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Learning to Say "Yes, And": An Introduction to Improv Philosophy for Library Professionals

Learning to Say "Yes, and"
An Introduction to Improv Philosophy for Library Professionals

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Introduction

The librarian stands in the warm glow of the projector light, whiteboard near at hand, seeking to command the attention of students in much the same way the actor on the stage sweats under the heat of stage lights, hoping to captivate the audience. The students, commonly seated in rows, mimic the audience in the theater. The audience squirms in their seats, awaiting intermission (or the end of class), feeling restless or dissatisfied.

The scene above highlights the similarities between librarians in their role as instructors and traditional stage actors. Discussions of instruction as performance most commonly center on the traditional classroom instructor. Many readers will be able to picture that favorite teacher from the past who has transformed rote instruction into something far closer to performance. In contrast, librarians have long suffered under the weight of perceived stereotypes. The librarian from Central Casting comes complete with bun and glasses and can shush at fifty yards. While these stereotypes have evolved over time, many do not view librarians in the same light as traditional instructors. However, they engage in many of the same roles, most prominently instruction. In this context, instruction is typically associated with a traditional classroom environment. However, instruction can also be individual, as in the case of a reference interview or reader advisory query.

The adoption of performance techniques can reinvigorate the instructional experience. The same goes for the library experience. There is robust literature linking performance theory to classroom instruction. There is a smaller but growing body exploring those same themes within librarianship. In *The Craft of Librarian Instruction*, Artman, Sundquist and Dechow (2016) present the most complete discussion to date regarding the practical application of acting techniques to library pedagogy. The work presents a thorough and enlightening treatment of the subject. The goal of this article is to build upon one particular area mentioned in this work, improvisational (improv) theater.

R. Keith Sawyer (2004) argues that the teaching as performance metaphor, while useful, is also problematic in that it suggests that the instructor working from a scripted lesson plan with the students serving in the role of a passive audience. He suggests that it would be more useful to reconsider teaching as *improvisation performance*, as it better captures the idea of flow and unpredictability in classroom discussions. He also makes an important distinction. Teaching is *disciplined* improvisation, with a broad structure to work from and broad goals to work toward, as opposed to traditional improv performance that is typically unscripted and less focused on goals than telling a story.

According to Dr. Gisela Ewert (1986), librarians have performed instructional tasks as far back as the seventeenth century. Librarians emulate many of the functions of classroom instructors, especially when providing bibliographic instruction. Single library instruction sessions within a semester-long course embody Sawyer's notion (2004). For example, if a librarian hypothetically had multiple sessions of a first year-experience course, those courses would typically have a similar set of informational goals; however, the specific method by which one might attain those goals may differ from session-to-session and librarian-to-librarian.

In this article, the commonalities shared by educators and stage performers will be examined, with a more specific focus on the improvisational aspects of performance. We will also present some of the basic tenants of improvisation with comparative discussion in the contexts of stage performance and library work.

Commonalities of instructors and performer

The art of teaching and the art of performance have much in common. Instruction, like acting, is all about the conveyance of information to an audience. As Pagowsky and Rigby (2014) note:

> Librarians are in the business of presentation. Whether we are presenting information or presenting ourselves in public, it is a constant of the profession. And all of our constituents-especially our served communities-judge our presentation, consciously or subconsciously as to whether they can see us as a reliable, authoritative source of information (p.1).

Although the content differs, the idea is the same. In the classroom, the instructor's intent is to convey the content of the lessons for a specific session. On the stage, actors strive to tell an affecting story through physical, verbal, and emotional expression. It is important to note here that the actor and the librarian may be expressing "manufactured"

emotions. As professional literature has expressed, library work can be emotionally challenging. Not all librarians have positive feelings about their roles as instructors, and negative instructional outcomes can result (Julien and Genuis, 2009). Suppressing correlated negative emotions or expressing dissonant emotions through surface or deep acting can lead to negative outcomes. In Miriam L. Matteson and Shelly S. Miller's "A study of emotional labor in librarianship," the emotional burden of library work is studied. Librarians can experience a broad range of emotions that may seem inappropriate to express, according to job requirement perceptions (Matteson and Miller, 2013). To address the whole of librarian emotional labor moves beyond the scope of this article, but performance techniques can be effective in easing emotional burdens through mindfulness, physical preparation, and psychological preparation.

In a 2001 Gallup poll of the American public, 40% of respondents expressed fear of speaking to an audience in public, second only to fear of snakes (Brewer, 2001). Educators and stage performers are not immune to such fears. Andrew Salomon (2011) describes the work of researcher and professional actor Gordon Goodman in the occurrence and nature of stage fright. Goodman surveyed 136 professional actors. Of those surveyed, 84% reported experience at least one bout with stage fright in their careers. This experience was described as sudden instead of gradual, likening the problem to a frozen or overloaded computer. Former English professor Elaine Showalter (2003) provides a useful discussion of the factors that contribute to teacher anxiety. Among these is performance. She provides multiple anecdotes that range from the deep-seated personal need to maintain control of one's self and presentation, replete with descriptions of sweaty palms and fear of being exposed as a fraud to more broadly based concerns about the perceived need to "perform" for ones' students to earn positive evaluations.

In her discussion of commedia dell'arte (an early precursor to modern-day improv) in the classroom, Ewald (2005) notes three specific elements that influence anxiety levels. First, the speaker's own perceived incompetence, which can manifest for any number of reasons. These might range from lack of skill to generalized fear of failure. Second, the audience itself can be a source of fear, particularly if it is unfriendly or unfamiliar. Third and finally, the context of communication is also a potential fear factor. This includes things such as audience status, setting, and size.

Preparation is key to reducing anxiety for both groups. Each spends years learning about and honing their respective crafts. Many traditional classroom instructors work to master pedagogic theory and practice, as well as varied subject matter. Librarians work to master search techniques, philosophy, and an ever-evolving set of tools and resources. For both traditional classroom instructors and librarians, determining the content and presentation for a given class or performance are keys to success. Each group spends time in lesson planning, determining objectives, considering the amount of material to be covered, and the presentation level of the material. A simple library instruction session is not always so simple.
Stage performers work to prepare physically and psychologically, continually refining control of their bodies, voices, and emotions to give compelling performances. They are often called upon to memorize content and practice the delivery of lengthy dialogue. They attempt to imbue that dialogue with emotion and gravity, connecting with fellow performers, all the while having to keep complex stage directions in mind. For each group, it takes great effort to put on a seemingly effortless performance.

Improvisation

What is it?

The veteran improviser Dave Pasquesi provides a useful if academic starting point:

> **im·prov·i·sa·tion**: noun. *The act of making something up as it is performed. This term is usually used in the context of music, theater, or dance.*
> **Im·prov·ise**: verb. *To fabricate out of what is conveniently at hand.*
> (Jagodowski and Pasquesi, 2015, p. xi)

Director Mick Napier's definition is somewhat more direct, though no less useful: *Improvisation is getting on stage and making stuff up as you go along* (Napier, 2015, p. 1).

Pasquesi goes on to express a fundamental difference with both the formal definition, as well as Napier's. He emphasizes performances are not created out of nothing but are the result of continual preparation by knowing and learning all that is possible about the world, in all its aspects, and to contemplate all of it (Jagadowski and Pasquesi, 2015, p. xii).

Bermant (2013) concurs, asserting that rehearsal, not of content, but of fundamental improv forms and exercises is the basis for spontaneous creation. Improvement in performance comes from the practice of form-building "games" emphasizing particular skills or structures until those forms are so deeply ingrained that they become natural.

Extending Pasquesi's idea beyond its performance context yields the conclusion that everyday life is, in fact, a continual exercise in improvisation. Many positive experiences arise daily reacting to information and events that are unplanned and unscripted. Shakespeare *and* Napier are correct: all the world is a stage, and we play our parts, making it all up as we go.

"Yes and…"

If there is a cardinal rule for improvisers, it is the idea of "yes, and..." At its heart, "yes, and" is meant to foster trust and agreement. It is the tacit agreement that all performers

involved in the scene acknowledge and work within the same reality. It is among the first concepts presented in improv classes. Without a basis of trust and agreement in the reality of a scene, the scene tends to crumble and can become uncomfortable for the audience and performer alike.

When one is learning a new language, they often go through rigorous drills meant to drive home the linguistic conventions of the new language. The phrase "yes, and…" serves much the same function for fledgling improvisers, helping them recognize opportunities for character agreement and scene progression. "Yes, and…" exercises typically involve one player making an offer within a scene. "Offers" in improvisation are the fuel to start a scene, typically a phrase or idea, but offers may be physical as well, depending on the context of the scene. Countering the "offer" with "yes, and…" adds new information to build and extend the scene, creating additional opportunities for improvisers to further character development and raise the situational stakes of a scene.

As the improviser grows, the notions of acceptance and progression become second nature, the training wheels of "yes, and…" may be removed. It becomes far more important to respect the philosophy of "yes, and..." rather than the words themselves, according to veteran improvisers T.J. Jagadowski and Dave Pasquesi (2015).

In the library environment, an opportunity to practice the philosophy of "yes, and…" presents itself most readily in the form of the individual reference interview. Improvisers often receive "offers" in the form of a location, color, job, etc. Librarians receive "offers" in the form of reference and research queries. One or two-word suggestions can initiate an improv scene. In much the same vein, library patrons often begin their process with the seemingly simplest questions or scantest of ideas. In many cases, patrons may not know what they are truly seeking. This represents the chance for librarians to collaborate with the patron and a better understanding of their needs. In turn, this leads to the construction of more appropriate queries, and eventually to resources to address patron needs. In these cases, it is important to follow the spirit of "yes, and…" and ask questions that help draw out the true intent of the patron. For instance, a user may want to find an item for a report on a specific topic. Librarians can begin with a metaphorical "yes, and…" by asking relatively open-ended questions of the patron such as: *What is it about this topic that is important to you? Why did you pick this topic?* Open-ended queries like this allow an opportunity for the patron to respond on their own terms, without preconceptions on the part of the librarian as to what will help them achieve greater clarity and agency in the discovery process.

Improvisers are fortunate in that their "offers" are usually fresh and new. In the library environment, this is not always the case. Patrons or students often ask the same (or similar) questions throughout the day, to the point that responses can become pre-emptive, if not blatantly rote. Keeping the "yes, and…" philosophy in mind for each transaction can help mitigate the potential for these problems to arise. Keeping a fresh vision and approach for each problem can be helpful in maintaining focus on the patron. This is especially important in high-traffic environments or situations where several users are asking highly similar questions. Even when a question has been asked ten times, for the person asking it the eleventh time, it can hold vital importance. Librarians owe the patron the respect to be as fully engaged and thoughtful as possible in all interactions.

"Yes, and…" philosophy can be applied in intraoffice activities and interpersonal relationships as well. Dohe and Pappas (2017b) use the example of a project meeting where there is a discussion of various options regarding the adoption of a new product. They propose two scenarios. The first is perhaps the more typical project planning experience, wherein options are summarily dismissed for a variety of reasons and ultimately resulting in inaction. On the flip side, when the project team looks for ways to make things work, finding avenues that allow for progress and innovation, the result is a more motivated, engaged team of colleagues.

Author Patricia Ryan Madson (2005) asserts that it takes courage and optimism to say "yes," allowing sharing of control. In those situations where those in decision-making positions can say, "yes," there is an increased level of agency in the execution of projects on the part of staff and faculty. In turn, this may lead to greater enthusiasm and morale in the workplace and the generation of new ideas for other programs and services.

Conscious listening

Next to "yes, and…" the next most emphasized aspect of improv performance is the idea of actively listening to your fellow performers. Conscious listening is the art and skill of becoming vulnerable and open to receiving not only verbal cues but nonverbal cues as well. It is paying attention to the content delivered and the context of delivery. What was the tone of voice? The volume? What messages does the body language send?

Due to the unscripted nature of improv, performers simply do not know one moment to the next what offers the will receive. They rely on the information provided to build scenes and stories. For this reason, developing one's listening skills is paramount to the success of a scene.

Veteran improv duo T.J. Jagadowski and Dave Pasquesi offer a wonderful insight into the importance of listening in the context of performance:

> TJ tells me everything. The way he looks at me tells me who I am. Tells me who he is by how he is standing, moving, sitting, talking. The way he behaves and what he says in front of me tells me about the nature of our relationship (Jagadowski and Pasquesi, 2015, p. 37).

Pasquesi also relates a lesson from improv pioneer Del Close that a line is never truly delivered until it is received. The performer relies on the reaction of their scene partners: "When we truly listen…we are taking in all that information and being affected by it (Jagadowski and Pasquesi, 2015).

In the library environment, we may not have the opportunity for the transcendent connection alluded to in the passages above, but there are chances to emulate the spirit of Pasquesi's words. Because reference interactions resemble improv in that they are unscripted and unrehearsed, each one represents an opportunity for the patron to feel heard and understood.

Librarians often take for granted that library users are, in fact, not librarians. The typical user does not necessarily have the same reverence for the process or resources that information professionals hold so dear. Many may not even know what it is that they truly need. For these reasons, practicing conscious listening techniques becomes all the more important. If the reference interview is the "scene", it is the librarian's job to work with the library user to progress the scene to its close. In this case, helping the user to find the sources needed or providing some measure of clarity in the process allows the "scene" to be close.

The librarian needs to be "there" for the user, both in terms of location and attention. Paying attention to nonverbal cues can often provide more information than verbal cues. If a librarian sees a puzzled look or hears an exasperated breath, this can be a source of valuable information regarding potential approaches to the interaction. The librarian needs to be mindful and present for the patron during the inquiry process as well, paying attention to the responses and allowing expression of complete thoughts without judgment or interruption.

Improv performers change during the course of a scene with the introduction of new information. In much the same way, librarians must allow the course of the reference interview to change based on the information provided by the patron. They must do so while avoiding the dual temptations to interject prematurely and think ahead to the resolution of the query. Librarians spend their entire careers cultivating familiarity with wide ranges of resources and techniques and are often eager, or even overeager, to share their hard-won expertise. Librarians must resist the urge to interject themselves at inappropriate junctures. As Jo Henry and Howard Slutsky remind us, "Through mindful listening, proper, mindful responses result" (Moniz et al., 2016).

Blocking

Intellectual manifestation of blocking

If "yes, and…" philosophy encourages us to take chances, to be courageous, and embrace the spirit of possibility, blocking is its evil twin.

In the world of theatrical improvisation, a common definition for the term "blocking" is the denial of the established reality of a scene. For example, the premise of an improv scene has been established as an awkward first date between nervous teenagers. Another performer walks in and boldly announces he is leading the mutiny against the Pirate King. While sure to generate a reaction, it is likely to be interpreted as a complete and utter denial of the established reality of the scene. Blocking is among the most frustrating experiences one can have on stage, requiring some very deft maneuvering to integrate the dissonant ideas.

Blocking does not always manifest itself so blatantly. It frequently shows up in more subtle ways. Dohe and Pappas (2017b) note that some of the more insidious forms of denial come cloaked in the mantle of "yes." The most common variation might be the phrase "yes, but…" At first blush, this seems to be a positive response but really amounts to little more than a "no" in disguise. They go on to describe other variations on the same themes, using so-called "stop words," such as "because" and "whatever." When coupled with "yes", these words do little to encourage the development of ideas.

It is easy to find similar behavior in the library environment away from the classroom. Each of us has spoken to a colleague or superior, excited about an idea or suggestion, only to have it summarily dismissed. Dohe and Pappas (2017a) provide a lengthy discussion about the impact of the word "no." When one hears the word enough, it creates an unwillingness to propose new ideas for fear of rejection out-of-hand. They also note that in some persistently toxic environments, "no" may be used as a power play to preserve one's place or draw attention to oneself at the expense of the greater good. Bergren, Cox, and Detmar (2002) also address the impact of "no" within the workplace, asserting that the word only serves to halt progress, and damages the bonds of trust and integrity. They also assert that organizations that function with a "no" posture are bound to never truly achieve success.

It is not always possible to say "yes" to every idea or suggestion "offer" for a new library program or service. Libraries do not exist in a world with infinite resources to dedicate to various projects. Individuals develop habits and workflows over time and may be averse to or even threatened by change. Organizations present their own set of challenges, from arcane procedures and policies to shifting budget priorities. Operational realities impose upon best intentions, and some are compelled to reject or postpone projects. This differs from the idea of blocking in that denial is not necessarily out of malice or insecurity, but often comes from operational necessity.

Instructor and songwriter Melissa Talhelm (2015) notes that similar situations can take place in the classroom, observing that instructors are often, through behavior or perception, placed in the role of final authority, the oracle with all the answers, dismissing incorrect responses. She reinforces the idea that even when correction is needed,

instructors need to be more accepting of what students bring to the classroom, or in the case of librarians, what they bring to interactions at the reference desk.

Physical /nonverbal manifestation of blocking

In improv, the notion of blocking typically relates to intellectual contributions. It is possible, though, to block one's stage partners physically. On stage, performers may ignore or miss the contributions of other players or deliberately perform physical actions or movements and potentially damage the reality of the scene. At the reference desk or in the classroom, physical blocks can manifest themselves in several ways, ranging from apparent apathy exhibited through body language to the erection of actual physical barriers. Who among us is not guilty of sinking our head behind a monitor when we spot a problem patron in our midst or using the lectern as an artificial barrier (and safe space) when delivering a lecture?

A student or patron is more likely to engage when the librarian uses apparently positive non-verbal cues, versus neutral or even aversive behavior (Quinn, 2001, p. 76). To lessen the impact of physical blocking gestures, librarians should strive to be mindful of their physical presence. In an office, at the reference desk or in front of a class, the librarian may physically position themselves in such a way to invite questions. Slouching denotes disinterest or irritation. They should adopt a more erect, posture, denoting interest. They may even elect to lean slightly toward the student in order to show interest and a desire to hear more. When engaging in conversation, does the librarian make eye contact? Do eyebrows raise in interest or furrow in anger? Softer facial expressions, increased eye contact, and smiling even slightly can serve to lessen tension and increase comfort and trust in interpersonal interactions (Gamble and Gamble, 2017).

There are practical, easily accessible options for improvement of one's nonverbal communication. Practicing in front of a mirror, taking video recordings of oneself, or asking a trusted colleague to give feedback, can all be helpful practices to begin the process of being mindful of one's own physical gestures. Body language with negative connotations that denote anger or defensiveness, such as crossing one's arms across the chest, can be recognized and remedied.

There are also distracting physical habits that can block a library instructor's intended lesson. Nervous physical habits, such as nail-biting, hair twirling, lip biting, clothing straightening, and more, can detract from the focus on content. Body cues are frequently unconscious and take time and practice to change. Recognizing a negative or distracting behavior is the first step to stopping it. It is common in beginning this process to notice are several behaviors that may need alteration. One should take time to examine each of these behaviors individually, so as not to feel overwhelmed with the need to change. Divorce these needs for behavioral change from judgments on personal character. Being mindful of and taking action to minimize distracting physical habits impacts how a librarian appears, but no actual changes to one's character necessarily need take place.

Why blocking happens

Blocking can manifest itself for any number of reasons. The easiest and most obvious is that the performer interrupting the scene is selfish. Digging a little more deeply, blocking is often rooted in insecurity. Programs such as "Whose Line Is It Anyway?" have done much to popularize improv. The program relies on performers taking part in short-form "games" with set parameters. The intent of the "games" is to be light-hearted and comedic. Performers illicit hoots, shouts, and laughter when stretching the parameters of these games in unexpected or outrageous ways.

Performers influenced by this program, or others like it, may become preoccupied, their attention diverted from fellow performers to the audience, wondering why the audience is or is not giving the desired reaction. In contrast to preoccupation with the audience's reaction, performers may also find themselves stuck in their own heads obsessing over their own ideas about how the scene could or should progress or about their place in the scene.

In the seminal work on improvisation, *Truth in Comedy*, improv pioneers Chana Halpern and Del Close eloquently describe one of the fundamental traps of improv performance:

> An actor following each moment through to the next is constantly making discoveries… If a player is planning ahead and thinking about the direction he wants the action to go, then he isn't paying attention to what is going on at the moment. (Halpern and Close, 1994, p. 71).

Similarly, forms of blocking which occur in the library or classroom environment are broadly tied to insecurity. As previously noted, there is a level of anxiety in presenting or speaking to a group. This anxiety can extend into interpersonal interactions. Many librarians struggle with self-consciousness for a variety of reasons. Utilizing the blocking mechanisms previously noted, consciously or unconsciously, may very well serve as a protective barrier.

Freedom to fail

Improv, like all artistic endeavors, relies upon failure to achieve eventual success. Improvisers make themselves vulnerable during every performance. Each scene, and each choice within those scenes, is the opportunity to make a mistake, which may lead to something wonderful. Where workers in other fields or students in the classroom might have a fear of those mistakes, improvisers embrace mistakes as springboards to opportunity. Corporate improv trainer Amy Lisewski (2016) asserts that improvisers not only risk failure often but are trained actively embrace it because it is in the mistakes that the greatest gifts are often found.

Kelly Leonard (2016), Director of Insights and Applied Improvisation at The Second City theatre concurs:

> This is perhaps the healthiest aspect of improvisational practice: it allows you to model failures over and over again, building up your ability to repeatedly make mistakes and then... to persevere. For most people, the "power failure" will serve to jolt them out of their complacency and provide them with a whole new set of fresh insights. For those who practice improvisation, you don't have to rely on the major screw up to adapt your thinking. We are taught that mistakes are gifts and we use them as part of the story we are telling - a story, by the way, that is not just being told by us. (The Freedom to Fail, para. 8).

Library reference and classroom environments, like improv performances, present ample opportunities to embrace failure as a positive. High school teacher Andrew Miller (2015) posits that many teachers assume the mantle of infallibility, reflecting negatively on the school culture. He argues that instead of adopting this omnipresent posture, instructors should acknowledge when something is not working and use it as a tool for reflection. He also asserts that addressing problems presents a positive model of perseverance and can generate a greater level of trust with students.

The same goes for the library environment. In the classroom or at the reference desk, there are myriad factors that can cause a less than optimal interaction. Computers fail, websites go offline at inopportune times, or a slip of the tongue can throw off even the most experienced professional. In the course of the reference interview or classroom presentation, it is common to trace and retrace steps when assisting a patron or demonstrating a search strategy. Sometimes there is a struggle to develop an effective set of search parameters. When these situations occur, the librarian is humanized, the mantle of infallibility removed. For many library users, this will make the librarian more approachable. In addition, these situations help demonstrate that research is not always a cut and dried proposition. It is sometimes messy, even for a professional. Belben (2010, p.17) asserts, "Our jobs require accuracy, but there is also much room for trial and error…we are destined to err occasionally".

Many strategies used to deal with mishaps and mistakes are strictly psychological. However, there are also physical tools that can help. Among the most effective is the "Transformative Failure Bow", also known as the "Circus Bow" (DesMaisons 2012a).

Originated by improvisers Edward Sampson and Matt Smith, the Circus Bow takes the idea of berating oneself for making a mistake and flips it on its head. The perpetrator puts his arms in the air and proudly acknowledges the offending act. It accomplishes several positive purposes. The offending party takes responsibility, while their proverbial record is wiped clean. Quickly acknowledging a mistake in a positive, open way, the performer can reset focus to the present moment. As Madson (2005, p.108) expresses it: "I did not let the miscue became the event, just one moment of it".

DesMaisons (2012b) goes on to explore the work of social psychologist Ann Cuddy in relation to the psychology of body language. Briefly explained, Cuddy explored the dynamics of power and physical positioning as they manifest in non-verbal communication. Those who have power or feel powerful open themselves up, occupying space. Those without power or who perceive themselves as weak tend to compact themselves, physically manifesting their psychological smallness (Cuddy 2012). The allusion is clear. The Circus Bow allows us to assume a feeling of power and control over mistakes instead of allowing them to diminish the creative process.

Discussion

In this work, we sought to acquaint the reader with the essential elements of improvisational performance as well as illuminate the connection between traditional classroom instruction, instruction in the library environment, and stage performance. In the midst of the research for this project, a robust discussion of performance theory and technique as it applies in the traditional classroom setting became apparent. However, there is a relative lack as it applies specifically to the field of librarianship. This lack represents an interesting opportunity to explore aspects of performance theory and application of techniques from multiple artistic disciplines within the field of librarianship to create the field of "Library Performance Studies," if you will.

We also sought to demonstrate how adopting elements of improvisational theatrical performance into one's professional practice yields positive results. Embracing a "Yes, and…" philosophy, avoiding blocking, and engaging in the practice of conscious listening clearly have applications within the field of librarianship. While most applicable in the classroom and at the reference desk, these practices also have a place at the meeting table. Adopting a flexible, welcoming attitude benefits everyone involved. Students and co-workers that feel truly heard are more likely to walk away with a positive outlook.

Conclusion

Improv offers the chance to create outside the consequence of failure. Very few venues in our lives offer similar opportunities. Educating oneself in the techniques and philosophies behind improv and applying them in professional practice can reap positive benefits right away. Improv urges us to live and act in the moment whenever possible and to eschew overthinking. It pushes us to pay closer attention not only to the world-at-large but also in more focused and intimate settings. We are encouraged to listen and engage more thoughtfully than we might otherwise. At the end of the day, whether we are librarians, teachers, or actors, we are ultimately communicators.

> In the dance of communication, we move together with another person gracefully, pleasurably, sharing the pure animal joy of community.
>
> Not being able to communicate is the Siberia of everyday life - a place, crazily, we send ourselves to.
>
> But the solution, in my view, isn't a formula, a list of tips, or a chart that shows where to put your feet. Instead, it's transforming yourself- like going to the gym- only a whole more fun.
>
> Practicing contact feels good. It's not like lifting weights. It feels good while you're doing, not just after you stop.
>
> When it clicks, when you're in sync with someone, even for the briefest moment, it feels like the pleasure of reconciliation. We're no longer apart. We have an actual two-way conversation. We go from "No you're wrong" to "oh. Maybe you're right." And boom. Dopamine.
>
> It's a good feeling. I think we crave it (Alda 2017, p.195).

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